

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00461 080829Z

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /007 W
----- 063052
R 080646Z MAY 75
FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3349
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY BONN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: APER, PFOR, ET
SUBJECT: ERITREA: SAFETY OF AMERICANS - SAFEHAVEN ARRANGEMENTS

REF: A) BONN 07322; B) ASMARA 0448 NOTAL; C) ADDIS ABABA 5286
NOTAL; D) STATE 10138 NOTAL

1. THE ERITREAN EMERGENCY HAS PERSISTED FOR OVER THREE MONTHS NOW, ALTHOUGH ASMARA ITSELF HAS NOT REALLY BEEN ATTACKED SINCE MID-MARCH. AT PRESENT, FIGHTING BETWEEN INSURGENTS AND GOV'T FORCES CONTINUES SPORADICALLY AT SOME REMOVE FROM ASMARA BOTH TO THE NORTH AND SOUTH. AS INDICATED REF B, REPORTS OF INSURGENT PLANS FOR A RENEWAL OF ATTACKS ON ASMARA IN MAY OR JUNE CONTINUE TO BE RECEIVED. THE ONSET OF THE HEAVY RAINS IN MID-JUNE IS MOST OFTEN MENTIONED AS THE TIME MOST FAVORED BY THE INSURGENTS FOR RENEWED ACTION BECAUSE THE MOBILITY OF THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY WOULD BE REDUCED AND THE USE OF AIRCRAFT WOULD BE INHIBITED.

2. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PRESENCE IN ASMARA OF A FORMIDABLE ARRAY, SIX BATTALIONS, OF ETHIOPIAN TROOPS, WITH ANOTHER ELEVEN PLUS NOT FAR AWAY, NOW MORE OR LESS "BLOODED" WITH NEW TACTICS (REACTION FORCES) AND IMPROVED LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS VASTLY BETTER DISCIPLINE MILITATES AGAINST FUTURE ATTACKS ON THE CITY BY THE INSURGENTS. THE LATTER ALSO REALIZE THAT THE CIVILIAN POPULATION, ON WHOM THEY DEPEND FOR SUPPORT, WOULD SUFFER THE MOST DURING AND AFTER ANY FIGHTING IN THE CITY.

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3. ASIDE FROM RENEWED HOSTILITIES IN ASMARA THAT COULD ENDANGER

THE REMAINING AMERICANS, THE MOST SERIOUS CONCERN HAS BEEN THE REACTION OF THE INSURGENTS TO THE U.S. DECISION TO RESUPPLY AMMUNITION TO THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY. TO DATE THERE HAS BEEN NO OVERT REACTION, DESPITE EARLIER FEARS, AND ON THE BASIS OF INFORMATION REACHING THE CONGEN, IT APPEARS LESS LIKELY NOW THAT THERE WILL BE ONE.

4. CONSEQUENTLY, AMERICANS HERE ARE INCREASINGLY INTERESTED IN HAVING THE BAN ON DEPENDENT TRAVEL LIFTED SO THAT THEIR FAMILIES CAN JOIN THEM, MYSELF NOT LEAST OF ALL. DEPENDENTS OF CONGEN STAFF MEMBERS ARE PRESENTLY AT SAFEHAVENS IN BANGKOK (KLOTZBACH), BONN (HAM), AND ADDIS ABABA (SHERRY). DEPENDENTS OF OTHER USG AGENCIES AND CONTRACT GROUPS IN ASMARA HAVE BEEN EVACUATED TO THE U.S. MY SECRETARY (POTTER) IS POISED IN ADDIS ABABA.

5. RECOMMENDATION: AFTER CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION OF THIS PROBLEM WITH ALL CONCERNED HERE, AND TAKING THE MILITARY VIEWS OF THE EUCOM REP INTO ACCOUNT, WHILE TRYING TO STRIKE A PRUDENT BALANCE, I RECOMMEND AT THIS TIME DEPENDENTS AND EVACUATED STAFF MEMBERS BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO ASMARA IF THERE HAS BEEN NO RENEWAL OF FIGHTING IN OR NEAR THE CITY BY THE END OF JUNE. I WOULD APPRECIATE HAVING THE DEPARTMENT'S AND EMBASSY ADDIS ABABA'S CONCURRENCE AND/OR COMMENTS.
SHERRY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LIBERATION FRONTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ellisoob
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975ASMARA00461
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750161-0664
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750567/aaaacjiw.tel
Line Count: 85
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BONN 07322, 75 ASMARA 0448, 75 ADDIS ABABA 5286
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ellisoob
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <29 MAY 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <08 OCT 2003 by ellisoob>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ERITREA: SAFETY OF AMERICANS - SAFEHAVEN ARRANGEMENTS
TAGS: APER, PFOR, ET
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006